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Contradictory Narratives in Sorbian Literature

The Concept of a ‘Sorbian Island’ and Discourses of Hybridity

This article reflects on contradictory narratives of Sorbian identity in Sorbian literature. In order to avoid the simple application of concepts that emerged in hegemonic contexts to minority narratives, as well as a view of minorities as incomparable case studies (for a discussion of this problem from a narratological perspective, see Kim 2012), this article seeks to understand the dynamic interplay between hegemonic concepts and specific minority literary works and contexts. In Sorbian literature (for an overview see Joachimsthaler 2011 and Lorenc 2004), for example, the concept of insularity and the image of a Sorbian island in the German sea¹ is much more important and helpful when analysing Sorbian narratives than the concept of the nation, though the nation does of course also appear.² This is not to claim that the Sorbian minority generally prefers to use concepts other than the nation, but instead to propose that if we read the narratives carefully (as done by Lorenc 1999) and analyse the cultural discourses in which they emerged (as done by Nedo 1965, Keller 2002 and Tschernekoschewa 2015), insularisation and hybridisation seem to be much more appropriate to the Sorbian situation than the hegemonic concept of the nation.³

1 The Sorbian writer and researcher Kito Lorenc speaks of the “traditionellen Bild von der ‘slawischen Insel im deutschen Meer’” [traditional image of the “Slavic island in the German sea”; Lorenc 1999: 409, my translation] and depicts the history of this metaphor from the 19th to the end of the 20th century (Lorenc 1999). In literature, this metaphor is especially important in Jakub Lorenc-Zalęski’s 1931 work *Kupa zabytych* (The Island of the Forgotten).

2 The Sorbian professional music and dance ensemble, for example, is known as the “Sorbian National Ensemble”. In popular discourse, of course, concepts such as “Sorbian national literature” are also used. Sorbs generally refer to themselves as “serbski lud” (Sorbian people).

3 Although the concept of hybridity is introduced later in this discussion, mainly via Tschernekoschewa’s research and publications (for example: 2015), it should be regarded as the necessary counterpart to the critique of insularity images put forward by Paul Nedo in the 1960s (see Nedo 1965).

1 Insularisation and hybridisation

Minority narratives are not only affected by hegemonic concepts – they are also confronted with a contradiction: on the one hand, they try to emphasise their cultural uniqueness and autonomy, not only as a means of self-empowerment, but also in order to be able to assert legal claims. On the other hand, they want to be recognised as equal members in the society in which they live and to which they largely feel a sense of belonging. The multiple belongings which appear in minority (and migrant) contexts have been convincingly described with the concept of hybridity (see Bhabha 2004; and with a focus on the Sorbs, Tschernokosheva 2015). In the recent past, both German and global society has developed a much more open attitude to transculturalism and multilingualism. At the same time, however, right-wing movements have grown, and a view of culture reminiscent of monolingualism and monoculturalism has reasserted itself (see Yıldız 2012 and Hitzke 2019: 17–20).

In societies where one language dominates – such as Germany – both members of minorities and migrants have knowledge of an additional language and, unlike the majority, live a multilingual, transcultural life. Even if cultural elements from minority and (post-)migrant communities – for example, traditional customs, food or music – are adopted into the majority culture or used commercially, the accompanying languages (such as Sorbian, Turkish or Russian in Germany) almost never take on a larger societal role. Unlike cultural hybridity, linguistic hybridity is often lived only by migrants and minorities. The important Chamisso Prize, which honours works in German that deal with cultural change or multiple cultural affiliations, speaks volumes in this respect, as it presupposes integration via the language. In general, the multilingualism of German culture is not very visible (see Joachimsthaler 2011 with regard to literature).

However, hegemonic cultures are not the only ones to produce monolingual and homogeneous narratives and constructions. Despite their multilingual, transcultural experience, minoritarian and migrant self-descriptions also refer to such ideas. The insularity narratives (see footnote 1 and the literary text by Jurij Koch discussed below) sometimes try to obscure or erase hybrid and entangled life worlds, raising the question of why multilingual and transcultural communities would present themselves as monolingual and homogeneous.

Because minority discourses are often founded on exclusion – as with the metaphor of an island – it doesn't seem promising to analyse them *either* through a lens influenced by methodological nationalism (which supposes, perhaps unconsciously, that there is a unity of a people, language and history/culture; for the concept see Wimmer/Glick Schiller 2002) *or* a perspective that focuses only

on hybridity and entanglement. I attempt to show how processes of insularisation and hybridisation are present in Sorbian literature.

This article does not concern itself with the question of why certain narratives in literature appear at a specific historical moment or in the texts of a specific author. Instead, I take a more systematic and structural approach to show the variety of conceptualisations of Sorbian culture. These range from a very narrow depiction of a Sorbian family on a farm threatened by its German surroundings in Jurij Koch's *Wišnina* (The Cherry Tree) to very open narratives that combine Sorbian-ness with worldliness, as in Jurij Brézan's *Krabat*, or depict Sorbian life as hybrid, as in the narratives of Angela Stachowa and Lubina Hajduk-Veljkovićowa.

Interestingly, very different images relating to insularity or hybridity can be found in narratives by the same author. The poet Róża Domaścyna, for example, writes both multilingual poems and poems depicting a way of Sorbian life that draw on the tradition of the insularity discourse (see Hitzke 2019: 124–130). Jurij Koch, whom I will later discuss in detail, depicts Sorbs and their way of life in very different ways depending on how much the Sorbs are affected by their German surroundings. A story about a German man who wants to win the affection of a Sorbian woman, even as he aims to destroy her family's land in his professional function as a hydraulic engineer (see Koch 2015, 1984), is treated quite differently than a story about the social problems within a single Sorbian community (see Koch 2008). In the first case, the Sorbian-German relationship is portrayed intimately, while in the second, the Sorbian community only interacts with its German surroundings through the larger, vaguer structures of the German state and economy.

The image of the island plays a key role in scholarship on Sorbian literature and culture. Elka Tschernokoshewa refers to Paul Nedo's 1965 criticism of the notion of Sorbian culture as an island (see Nedo 1965) in order to justify her own research perspective, which is based on concepts of hybridity. Tschernokoshewa summarises Nedo's criticism as follows: "Territoriale Abgeschlossenheit, Dauerhaftigkeit, Stabilität, Homogenität sind Grundparameter der Figur der ethnischen Insel" [Territorial seclusion, permanence, stability, and homogeneity are the basic parameters of the figure of the ethnic island; Tschernokoshewa 2015: 70, my translation]. She refers to Nedo's position against the fixation on language and his critique of German research on linguistic islands as nationalistic, revanchist and Nazi-imperialist (see Tschernokoshewa 2015: 71). Tschernokoshewa herself rejects the attempt to restrict Sorbian culture to an imagined island of linguistic and cultural homogeneity, and instead assumes a hybrid German-Sorbian life world in her own research. She overcomes notions of the island as a "homogenisierende[s] Paradigma" [homogenizing paradigm; Tschernokoshewa 2015: 72,

my translation] and investigates in its place the “Frage nach Vermischungen, neuen Konfigurationen oder doppelter Zugehörigkeit” [question of mixtures, new configurations or double affiliation; Tschernokoshewa 2015, my translation]. Although the conception of Sorbian culture as an island was criticised as early as 1965 and has been the subject of controversy ever since (Lorenc 1999 and Keller 2002), references to insularity can be found again and again in literature. Many works of fiction depict a homogenous, secluded rural village population which resembles the island described by Nedo (1965), Keller (2002: 300) and Tschernokoshewa (2015: 70). As I explain below, however, other texts offer a counter-image to the island – for example, Jurij Brězan’s *Krabat* (1976).

Recent conceptual work on the image of the island reminds us that island discourses need not be exclusively binary (“earth and water, land and sea, continental and insular, big and small, enclosed and open, close and remote, connected and secluded”, Dautel/Schödel 2016: 11). Rather, ideas of “seclusion, separation, self-enclosure, smallness and detachment” (Dautel/Schödel 2016: 11) allow for a certain ambivalence. Dautel and Schödel state: “Alternative concepts of islands [...] understand the sea surrounding an island not as a border but as a momentum of opening the insular space which connects the island into a flexible and open space [...]” (Dautel/Schödel 2016: 14). Other studies have described islands as interactive spaces or networks of exchange (see Goldie 2011: 7–8.). Of course, this re-evaluation of islands and insularity has not gone uncriticised – Elizabeth DeLoughrey, for example, to whom Goldie refers, warns against “unexamined celebrations of deterritorialization” (Goldie 2011: 10) that could lead to a failure to adequately address indigenous claims to land ownership, minority nationalist movements or forced migration (Goldie 2011: 10). In this respect, it is important to give due consideration to the difference between autonomy and belonging, as well as to the ambivalences with which minorities are confronted in their cultural self-descriptions.

2 Insularisation and hybridisation in Sorbian narratives

The question is whether and how a specificity of Sorbian culture has been constructed in literary texts since the 1970s and which narratives underlie these works. I start from the premise that in hybrid cultures and societies, different positions can be occupied and articulated by the same actors, and that these positions cannot be clearly categorised according to a process-like, open concept of

culture. In Sorbian literature, we find both narratives that describe a cultural specificity of the Sorbs and those in which Sorbian life is not described in terms of difference, but rather within the framework of intersectional diversity. The first type can be identified by processes of insularisation, the second by hybridisation.

It is therefore not only those texts in which the Sorbian culture constitutes the subject of the narration or in which it is of central importance that serve as objects of investigation, but also those in which Sorbian culture is not the primary subject. In response to criticism of the essentialising concept of culture, literary and cultural studies have shifted their focus towards identity and discursive positions (Jewishness, Irishness, migrant writing, etc.). This has made it possible to avoid rigid categories such as origin or territorial and national belonging, but it has also meant that narratives of cultural belonging that emphasise cultural specificity and difference have received more attention. Narratives that do not focus on difference, but rather emphasise the common ground in transcultural communities, have consequently faded from view. In order to avoid this trap, Sorbian life worlds should be examined without the presumption of their cultural specificity and difference.

In the following sections, I analyse a selection of texts that produce insular and hybrid life worlds, then juxtapose their contradictory narratives. It is particularly important here to explore the relationship between minority and majority. When does separation occur? At what level are differences identified and how are they justified? In which contexts are ideas of insularisation and hybridisation played against each other? How are the life worlds of minorities presented differently in hybrid (with reference to the majority society) versus homogenous contexts?

3 Hybrid and insular perspectives on Sorbian rural life: Jurij Brězan and Jurij Koch

In Jurij Brězan's novel *Krabat* (1976), the relationship between the Sorbian saga figure Krabat and his antagonist Reissenberg is not primarily explored as a relationship between the Sorbian and the German world, and thus between the minority and the majority. The opening and closing passages can be interpreted as calling into question the centuries-old contrast between the German and the Sorbian through the absence of the island motif and the alternative reference to rivers and the sea.

Monika Blidy points out that Brězan does not “wörtlich auf die traditionelle Insel-Symbolik zurückgreift” [literally refer back to the traditional island

symbolism; Blidy 2016: 43, my translation], but that “die räumliche Anordnung der in seinen Texten dargestellten Welt” [the spatial arrangement of the world depicted in his texts; Blidy 2016: 43, my translation] evokes it on several occasions. This shows how strong the influence of the island metaphor is, even in texts that develop a counter-concept. In any case, Brězan’s *Krabat* can be seen as a critical approach to the metaphor of an island in the sea as it was used in Sorbian literature (see Lorenc-Zalěski 2002 [1931], Lorenc 2004). In contrast to novels that begin with this metaphor, his begins and ends with the statement that the sea would be different “if it did not also include the water of the Satkula” (my translation, Brězan 2004: 15 and 420; Sorbian version: “njepřiwało tež wodu rěčki Satkule”, Brězan 1976: 5; German version: “nähme es nicht auch das Wasser der Satkula auf”, Brězan 2004: 15). Below, I quote the opening and closing sentences of the novel, first in the German version, then in the Sorbian version and finally in my own English translation .

Genau im Mittelpunkt unseres Kontinents – wie viele hierzulande irrtümlich glauben, also auch der Welt – entspringt die Satkula, ein Bach, der sieben Dörfer durchfließt und dann auf den Fluss trifft, der ihn schluckt. Wie die Atlanten, so kennt auch das Meer den Bach nicht, aber es wäre ein anderes Meer, nähme es nicht auch das Wasser der Satkula auf. (Brězan 2004: 15).

Dokladnje wosrjedź našeho kontinenta – potajkim tež swěta, kaž mnozy tule mylnje wěrja – žórlí so Satkula, rěčka, kotař sydom wjeskow poji a potom na rěku trjechi, kiž ju srěbni. Kaž atlasy tak tež morjo rěčku njeznaje, ale wono by bylo hinaše morjo, hdy by njepřiwało tež wodu rěčki Satkule. (Brězan 1976: 5).

[Exactly in the centre of our continent – and as many in this country mistakenly believe, of the world as well – the Satkula, a brook that passes through seven villages to meet the river that swallows it, has its source. Like the atlases, the sea does not know the brook, but it would be a different sea if it did not also include the waters of the Satkula.] (Brězan 2004: 15, my translation).

At the end of the novel, the passage of the brook varies:

[...] das Wasser der Satkula [...] – eines Bachs, der genau im Mittelpunkt der Welt entspringt, sieben Dörfer durchfließt und dann auf den Fluss trifft, der ihn schluckt. Wie die Atlanten, so kennt auch das Meer den Bach nicht. Aber es wäre ein anderes Meer, nähme es nicht auch das Wasser der Satkula auf. (Brězan 2004: 420)

[...] do wody Satkule – rěčki, kotař dokladnje wosrjedź swěta žórlí, sydom wjeskow poji a potom na rěku trjechi, kotař ju srěbni. Kaž atlasy tak tež morjo rěčku njeznaje. Ale wono by bylo hinaše morjo, hdy by njepřewzalo [sic] tež wodu rěčki Satkule. (Brězan 1976: 453)

[...] the waters of the Satkula, a brook that rises in the very centre of the world, flows through seven villages and then meets the river that swallows it. Like the atlases, the sea does not know the brook. But it would be a different sea if it did not also include the waters of the Satkula.] (Brězan 2004: 420, my translation)

The relationship between Sorbian culture and the world is described with the metaphor of water and flow, thus radically undermining the image of the border and unbridgeable disconnect. Krabat's metamorphoses and shapeshifting, as well as his appearance in different times and spaces, can also be described as a “flowing” or “streaming”. With its “poetics of flowing” (see Hitzke 2019: 135–144), the novel thus confronts the formative images of Sorbian literature – “the sea, the island, the ship” (see the title of Lorenc' *Das Meer, Die Insel, Das Schiff*, 2004, my translation) – with a surprisingly open alternative.

While the initially predominant phrase “swallowing” refers to the superiority of the sea and the majority, the relation between brook, river and sea is transformed over the course of both passages. Swallowing becomes including. Parallel to this, the geographical relativism (the opening passage speaks of the continent; in both passages, the atlases “do not know the brook”) is replaced by a new perspective. The final passage no longer mentions the continent and instead situates the Satkula and the seven villages at the centre of the world. Thus, the brook is no longer talked about as part of a cartographical reality in which it does not exist. Instead, it represents a reality of its own. On the one hand, this valorises the minority's own narrative and position; on the other hand, it also transfers the responsibility for the minority to the world community.

The cultural openness that *Krabat* introduces into Sorbian literature does not consist of exploring the relationship between Sorbian and German culture, but in locating Sorbian culture in the world and mapping the relationship between that world and the region of Lusatia. Brězan is topographically quite unambiguous (the river Satkula, along with Rosenthal and Bautzen, are real places); likewise, *Krabat*'s plot and other elements (like songs or the mythical figure of the Aquarius) are taken from Sorbian culture. At the same time, the regional, cultural and linguistic descriptions are not specifically marked as Sorbian, and many descriptions consciously remain open (for example, the unnamed seven villages, or the protagonist's name, Serbin, which only hints at Sorbian, etc.). The nearly identical passages at the beginning and end of the novel, with their focus on the waters of the Satkula, allow us to read *Krabat* as a novel which opens up new perspectives on the positioning of Sorbian culture within the world, one that is oriented towards openness and interweaving. Fortifications and borders (but also islands and ships) are abandoned in favour of flowing water and its associated hybridity.

In contrast to Brězan's approach, Jurij Koch's novella *Wišnina* (The Cherry Tree; 1984) takes up and reinforces familiar island narratives in a highly symbolic way. The story deals with the relationship between the Sorbian woman Ena and the German engineer Sieghart. The first scene already characterises this relationship as a threatening one: Sieghart drives his Jeep towards a house at night,

where Ena sits at a table with her fiancé, Mathias. From the beginning, Sieghart is an intruder in her life. He is portrayed as stereotypically male: he is unafraid, refuses help, constantly measures himself against others, likes technology and believes in progress. The contrasts between the German engineer and the Sorbian residents of the farm are also made apparent by their modes of transportation – Sieghart drives his Jeep, while Ena rides a bicycle, and Mathias, his horse. The contrast between nature and technology, a traditional way of life and modernity or progress, is not only strong, but also coalesces around the binary poles of Sorbian versus German culture.

Sorbian culture is presented as homogenous, close to nature and sustainable. The destruction of nature is closely associated with the decay of values and loss of tradition. For example, Ena's grandfather has to cut off the crown of a cherry tree because someone has driven a poisonous nail into it. He further tells Sieghart that the storks are not coming back this year, but Sieghart does not understand the grandfather's sadness. Sieghart's profession as an engineer stands in contrast to Ena's sustainable perspective. His company examines the soil in the area, practicing “constructive hydraulic engineering” and “settlement management” (both in my translation; German version: “Konstruktiver Wasserbau” and “Siedlungswirtschaft”, Koch 2015: 38; Sorbian version: “Konstruktivny wodotwar. Sydlerske hospodarstwo”, Koch 2005: 36). When Sieghart remarks that his whole family is involved with water, Ena responds:

“Ich, sagte sie, erschaffe nichts. Nehmen, was vorhanden ist. Weitergeben, was man selbst erhält. Teilen. Arbeit auf dem Feld. Mutter, Großvater, Mathias [...] Sein, wie die Menschen sind. Hier” (Koch 2015: 43).

“Ja, wona rjekny, ja bóhtónknjeza njehraju. Ja přijimuju a dale dawam. A ja njepytam. Kaž bych hižo namakała. Mać, džěd, Maćij. Džělo na polu. A doma. Doma, to je rjane słowo” (Koch 2005: 41).

[“I [...] create nothing. Taking what is available. Giving what you receive yourself. Sharing. Working in the fields. Mother, grandfather, Mathias ... Being as people are. Here”] (Koch 2015: 43, my translation).

Sieghart can take little pleasure in this attitude and asks if it isn't boring on the farm (Koch 2015: 44 and Koch 2005: 41). A further contrast arises between Sieghart's rational approach and Sorbian culture, which is depicted as shaped by myths. Traditional mythical figures such as the Aquarius appear in the narrative; their presence also blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination in the narrated world. For Sieghart, the Aquarius is an object of derision:

Irgendwann hatte er erfahren, dass die Menschen hier an den Wasserman glaubten, an irgend so ein Vieh unterm Wasser, an einen Mann mit Froschaugen und Flossen, an einen Frosch mit männlichen Zügen, weiß der Teufel (Koch 2015: 42).

Něhdźe bě zhonił, zo tu ludźo do wódneho muža wěrja, do někajkeho tajkeho skočeća pod wodu, do muža ze žabjacymi woćemi a ptujadłami, do žaby z muskimi kajkosćemi, čert wě (Koch 2005: 40).

[At some point he learned that people here believed in the Aquarius, some kind of under-water creature, a man with frog's eyes and fins, a frog with male attributes, the devil knows] (Koch 2015: 42, my translation).

From his perspective, the Sorbian myths are a joke, the farm inhabitants backwards. The whole plot serves to confirm the narrative of the Sorbian island in the German sea, which is constantly threatened by destruction. Sieghart intrudes in Ena's Sorbian life world and eventually succeeds in entering into a relationship with her. The relationship has fatal consequences. After Ena and Sieghart have grown closer, Sieghart and his colleagues attend Ena and Mathias's wedding-eve party. As Sieghart finally advances towards Ena, Mathias sees the two of them, drags them into his carriage and drives them wildly through the forest to the pond, where the carriage and horses end up in the water (see Koch 2015: 77 and Koch 2005: 71). Mathias drowns in the process. At first, Ena cannot imagine starting a relationship with Sieghart, but then she does. Their wedding takes place in winter and is depicted in stark contrast to the traditional Sorbian wedding on the farm that Ena would have celebrated with Mathias. Not only is it celebrated in winter instead of summer, in a hotel in the city instead of on the farm (see Koch 2015: 90 and Koch 2005: 84), the whole event is marked by sadness and disappointment, and is viewed as inappropriate by the Sorbian guests. Ena's grandfather says, "Zu Hause hätten alle getanzt. Dann wäre es gewesen, wie eine Hochzeit zu sein hatte" (Koch 2015: 91); "Doma bychu wsitcy rejowali. Tam by kwas byl" (Koch 2005: 85) ["At home everybody would have danced. Then it would have been like a wedding should be" (Koch 2015: 91, my translation)], and Ena imagines that she is wearing the traditional Sorbian bridal costume when she looks in the mirror (see Koch 2015: 92). Finally, on the evening of the wedding, Sieghart announces that he is being promoted and the couple is expected to move to Paris. Ena is not excited about this, replying, "Was soll ich dort?" (Koch 2015: 96); "Što ja tam dyrbju?" (Koch 2005: 89) ["What am I going to do there?" (Koch 2015: 96, my translation)]. As this scene indicates, Ena is unhappy in Paris. She frequently imagines seeing Mathias, and finally returns to the farm to put it all behind her. In the meantime, her grandfather has died, and another dramatic scene follows: wanting to bid farewell to her memories, she walks with a hunting rifle to the pond, where she believes she will see Mathias. When her vision of her dead lover says that she will never forget him, she shoots him – but in reality, she shoots Sieghart.

The plot structure makes it clear that the contrasts between the Sorbian and German worlds are perceived as being fixed within the framework of Koch's narrative. They are not created performatively through certain scenes or conversations, nor do they develop through concrete conflicts; rather, a number of opposites are presented as given (in this case, nature vs. technology; tradition vs. progress; sustainable living vs. destruction of nature; being tied to the farm vs. mobility). All of Ena's alternatives to the Sorbian wedding and life on the farm – her relationship with Sieghart, the wedding in the city, their departure for Paris – are presented from the beginning as doomed to failure. Due to the rigid distinction between the Sorbian and outside worlds, an encounter does not seem possible without conflict and catastrophe. Beyond the German environment, even France is portrayed as negative, which means that Ena remains bound to the Sorbian island. This however, has been marked by devastation: the area has been destroyed by economic development, and the traditional way of life is gradually being abandoned. Therefore, in this narrative, Sorbian life worlds are almost completely anchored in the past. The present is correspondingly marked by nostalgic projection into the past, and thus by a time that can no longer be retrieved. A conveyance of the Sorbian way of life into the present – by transformation, for example – does not seem possible. A life outside of Lusatia seems unimaginable and not worth living. As if to confirm this logic, the story ends after the deaths of three people.

The positions taken by Brězan and Koch, then, could not be more different: while the former situates Sorbian culture within the world, the latter depicts it as an island threatened by the German environment. Brězan shows hybrid worlds, while Koch presents a binary worldview that amounts to the destruction of a culture. In this respect, Koch's fiction echoes his journalistic work: he has written extensively on the decline of Sorbian villages due to lignite mining, describing its effects on the life of the local human and animal populations.⁴ Both narratives are indeed intertwined in his work. In his essay "Die Schmerzen der endenden Art" (The Pain of a Dying Species; Koch 1992), Koch draws parallels between a disappearing bird species and Sorbian culture:

⁴ Peter Barker highlights the link between those processes and the loss of the Sorbian way of life in Koch's view: "In *Die Landvermesser* [...], Koch raised for the first time the question of the relationship between the loss of cultural and spiritual values as a result of the destruction of the Sorbian way of life and the advantages conferred on society in general through industrial progress" (Barker 2006: 100). Furthermore, Barker quite rightly observes: "Koch sees the relationship between Sorbian and German culture as one in which the smaller one is essentially under threat. An insistence on clear frontiers he sees as the only possible defense against total submergence". (Barker 2006: 101).

Ich bin vom Wahnsinn der Metapher besessen. Ich will wissen, ob die beiden Exemplare der Mandelkrähe noch im Land sind. Es liegt im Urinteresse meiner ethnischen Art, daß ich wissen muß, ob in meiner Zeit, vor meinen Augen [...] etwas zu Ende gekommen ist, was nicht hätte zu Ende kommen sollen. Ich wünsche mir, der schöne Vogel möge noch da sein. So wie ich mir die Welt *nur mit meiner* ethnischen Art vorstellen kann. Sein, ihr Ausbleiben bedeuteten Verlust. Nach und nach wäre die Armut landesweit spürbar. Vielleicht sogar kontinental und planetar (Koch 1992: 42, emphasis in the original).

[I am obsessed with the madness of the metaphor. I want to know if the two specimens of the European roller still exist in the country. It is in the primal interest of my ethnic species that I know whether in my time, before my eyes [...] something has come to an end that should not have come to an end. I wish the beautiful bird was still there. Just as I can only imagine the world with my ethnicity. Its absence would mean loss. Little by little, the poverty would be felt nationwide. Perhaps even continental and planetary] (Koch 1992: 42, my translation).

According to the text's logic, the European roller is either in the country or it has disappeared; the text is not interested in its actual whereabouts. The same applies to Ena: she is either on the Sorbian farm or has disappeared from it; her life in Paris seems meaningless. Thus, we find here – in contrast to *Krabat* – a conception of Sorbian culture that remains separated from the world. Koch and Brězan thus provide extremely contradictory conceptions of what it means to belong to the Sorbian minority.

4 Non-binary perspectives and depictions of Sorbian city life: Angela Stachowa and Lubina Hajduk-Veljkovićowa

While the narratives by Jurij Brězan and Jurij Koch discussed above can be considered representative of Sorbian prose, Sorbian literature also offers alternatives to the homogeneous peasant image of the Sorbs. While Koch adopts the island discourse and Brězan develops alternatives to it, the authors Angela Stachowa and Lubina Hajduk-Veljkovićowa, by contrast, depict Sorbian lifestyles in urban environments. Thus, the idea of a Sorbian island that is strongly bound to the structure of the village and the farm is destabilised by the heterogeneous and multilingual space in which the protagonists move. In such a context, Sorbian culture must be represented by something other than village traditions.

The title story in Angela Stachowa's collection *Sobotu wječor doma. Powědančka* (Saturday Evening at Home: Stories, 1978) is about a couple. In a neutral and objective style, the first-person narrator reports on his relationship

and everyday life with his wife, Majka. The reader learns that the couple lives in an apartment in the old town centre. She is a teacher, and because he is in Berlin studying to become a teacher, they only see each other on weekends. The narrator makes references to Sorbian culture when he describes their wedding: for him, the traditional wedding was not particularly important, but he mentions its great social significance. The couple's weekends often follow the same pattern: on Friday evening, they tell each other everything that happened during the week, and on Saturday, they rest (see Stachowa 1978: 8–10).

One Saturday, instead of going to their parents' houses as agreed (his mother waits for them with lunch, her parents wait for them with coffee and cake), they stay home and spend the whole day sleeping in; in the evening, they go out. The suspenseful structure of the story suggests that something is going to happen. Since the story is mainly about everyday life and the couple's relationship, however, the reader is likely to assume that this will take the form of a complicated conversation, perhaps a quarrel. The narrator and his wife go to a restaurant and drink champagne. Then the incident occurs: they are approached by some drunken men and asked why they are speaking Sorbian. The situation escalates. The other diners in the restaurant do nothing to defend the Sorbian couple, who are not even allowed to call the police.

This episode of discrimination is shocking partly because, until now, the couple's Sorbianness has not been particularly marked. The narrator's simple, direct language and his casual discussion of the traditional elements of his wedding – embedded between breakfast and washing up – serve to downplay its distinctness. Rather, it becomes clear that while some traditions have continued, there is also a certain scepticism or indifference towards them. Traditional customs are presented as variable and transformable, and their meaning is questioned – quite in contrast to Koch's *Wišnina*. Here, Sorbian everyday life is described in relation to neither insularisation nor hybridisation. Nevertheless, the couple's life and relationship are disturbed by the discrimination in the restaurant. The experience is jarring for both the characters and the reader because it appears in the narrative without any prior construction of cultural difference.

One representation of hybrid Sorbian-German culture that avoids the trope of Sorbian culture as threatened or endangered can be found in Lubina Hajduk-Veljkovićowa's contemporary crime novel *Módry buny* (Blue Beans, 2018). The story takes place in the Sorbian-German community in Lusatia and provides insight into the everyday life of the Sorbian commissioner and her family. Janka Žurowa is portrayed as a woman who, in addition to her demanding work, acts as caregiver to both her child and her parents. She lives with her Bulgarian husband Manuš and her son Stanij in the old town of Bautzen and has an extended

Sorbian family. The Sorbian world is not portrayed as contrasting with the contemporary world, but rather as being part of it. The rumour mill from her Sorbian extended family helps Janka Žurowa to solve her criminal case, for example, and she has a productive working relationship with her German colleague. The Sorbian environment is described without clichés and, as a contrast to the traditional depiction of Sorbs, her husband Manuš, while preparing for the traditional fair, stands in the kitchen wearing a T-shirt with “fuck you all” emblazoned on it. Furthermore, Hajduk-Veljkovićowa modernises the Sorbian language and adapts it to the present.

5 Conclusion

As can be observed in Koch’s and Brězan’s narratives, the island motif is central, although different in the depiction of Sorbian culture. In the former case, it is confirmed; in the latter, it is questioned by the metaphor of flow. Processes of insularisation and hybridisation are characteristic of both narratives. An entirely different perspective that is partly due to the shift in action from the village to the urban space can be found in Angela Stachowa’s story – which, written in 1978, has a date of origin falling between those of Brězan’s (1976) and Koch’s (1984) narratives – as well as in the work of the present-day writer Lubina Hajduk-Veljkovićowa.

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